How can I write a story spanning 61 years in 1000 words? Maybe I should just send a picture.

I was born after the war as the fourth child of a refugee family living in a tiny farming village in Germany. It still has only one road that goes in and out and is not on the way to anywhere. Perhaps not the most auspicious beginning, but my parents loved me and my older siblings doted on me. We lived in two rooms in our assigned lodging, with the family of the local Lutheran pastor. One of my earliest memories is going down the village road to buy bread and being chased back by chattering geese, about the same size as me, but much more threatening.

When I had turned five our family immigrated to Canada, and we had the usual long ocean voyage from Bremerhaven in northern Germany to St. John, New Brunswick, followed by our cross Canada train ride that ended in Vancouver. I remember the triple bunk beds on the boat, and was very proud that I did not experience any seasickness.

I wanted to go to school immediately, but there was no public kindergarten in those days, and I had to sit out the year being babysat with my cousin by relatives, while my parents worked. My favourite experience during those days was being looked after occasionally by my mom's cousin who was acclimatized to Canada and let me make white toast with jam for breakfast. At home we stuck to our traditional rye bread from the German bakeries in the neighbourhood.

During my enforced delay in public education I learned English along with my siblings and we had lots of fun pronouncing German words in the English way. My older brothers taught me how to read and write in German before I started school.

We were poor, but didn't think of ourselves in that way. I remember begging to be allowed to go blueberry picking in Richmond with my older siblings when I was five, and picking 19 pounds of berries on one day. We got 5 cents a pound, but the boss was so impressed she gave me a whole dollar. I took that dollar home and gave it to my parents, as my way of saying I wanted to help.

We found enjoyable things to do like playing scrub baseball on our street. Whenever a car came by, we interrupted the game. A favourite pastime when we were little was to go to Stanley Park on Sunday afternoons with our dad. We took the bus and joined the crowds of people wandering around in the zoo area, an endless source of pleasure for me.

School was easy and I always had good friends. Along with all of my siblings I went on to higher education. Our parents, who had been very comfortably off before the war, told us they had decided to emigrate from Europe, having been displaced anyway, to give us kids a better chance of a successful life. Education was our ticket to reach our goals. It worked for all of us, including the two younger siblings who were born in Canada.

After graduation from university, life took me to Cameroon in West Africa where I worked as a volunteer teacher and nurse for a year. This experience has shaped my life in many ways. I learned that things could be done in different ways. The native children were a delight and to this day hearing the Cameroonian accent gives me great pleasure. I also met my husband through this experience.

Fresh from my African adventure and newlywed, I drove for the first time past Hope and arrived in Terrace. It was the end of summer in the early seventies, and slash burning was underway. I didn't see much of the Skeena Valley in my first few days and had no idea mountains surrounded us. A couple of days after my arrival I started my job by driving the road to Prince Rupert for orientation. I remember the series of one-lane bridges and the narrow road squeezed between the river and the railway tracks.

Like many young professionals we were wondering if we would stay in Terrace for a couple of years and then move on. We immediately loved the outdoor opportunities, but the amenities of life were not what they are today. Dusty roads were one of the things I disliked.

We continued to keep in regular touch with our families, and visits to our parents when we had children were important. We wanted them to know their grandparents. Years later, our daughter was able to live in her paternal grandparents' home for a few years.

At the same time, the north lured us as well. By a fortunate circumstance we were able to purchase lakefront property in the southern Yukon, and this has enabled us to visit and enjoy the beauty of the north. It is only in retirement, however, that we are able to make it a yearly event.

In the past few years we have rekindled a connection to Germany. Our son, who showed an interest in learning German while at university, became fluent in the language and applied for a transfer with his company. He has now joined the not inconsiderable number or expatriate Canadians living and working in Europe. The cycle is complete. I wonder where our grandchild will find her home.